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SOME PERCEPTIONS OF EXECUTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP.

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THIRTY-TWO ITEMS OF BEHAVIOR CONSIDERED CRUCIAL TO SUCCESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF RELATIONSHIPS WERE USED TO DETERMINE THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE FACULTY AND PRINCIPAL OF SIX SCHOOL STAFFS IN A DISTRICT OF 40,000 RELATIVE TO (1) THE IMPORTANCE THE FACULTY ATTACHED TO SOME OF THE PRINCIPALS' ACTIONS, (2) THE STAFF'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE VALUE HE PLACED ON THESE BEHAVIORS, AND (3) THE SEIMILARITY OF BOTH VALUES. EACH PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER WAS ASKED FIRST TO Q-SORT THE BEHAVIORS INTO SIX CATEGORIES, AND SECOND TO ASSESS THE BEHAVIORS HE BELIEVED THE OTHER VALUED. THE RESULTING FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS ILLUSTRATED THAT (1) THE PRINCIPAL INFREQUENTLY PERCEIVED FACULTY VALUES, (2) THE STAFF INFREQUENTLY PERCEIVED THE PRINCIPAL'S VALUES, AND (3) THE STAFF AND PRINCIPAL HELD DISSIMILAR PERCEPTIONS ON TWO-THIRDS OF THE ITEMS. THUS, EITHER ACCURACY OF INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION IS NOT ESSENTIAL TO SCHOOL PRODUCTIVITY OR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAS A POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS BY IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTIONS. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (35TH SESSION, CHICAGO, 1965) AND APPEARS IN "EDUCATIONAL FACTS," VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3. (JB)

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## Some Perceptions Of Executive Professional Leadership*

J. L. Fearing

The importance of accuracy in interpersonal perception has long been recognized in the literature concerning administration. Chester I. Barnard, in 1938, theorized from his experience in business management that accurate perceptions of organizational goals and individual needs are required in cooperative systems to insure a continuing organization. He postulated that differences of precision of perception in the social, physical, and biological environments account for gross errors of decision and are a limiting factor in cooperation (1:286). Other writers have tended to support Barnard's postulate.

### THE PROBLEM

A study recently undertaken by the author sought to explore in a limited way the logical connection between Barnard's concept of effective administrative authority and congruence of role perception. The domain of the study was executive professional leadership as represented by the elementary principal. By uncovering, in six selected elementary schools, whatever relationships existed between perceptions of the principal and his faculty concerning the relative worth each attached to certain common and observable role behavior of elementary school principals, it was hoped that an avenue toward increased teaching satisfaction and productivity would open.

These perceptions and relationships are best understood by posing the following questions which the study sought to answer.

1. Did the principal know the relative importance his faculty attached to some of the things he may do?
2. Did his faculty know how the principal valued these same behaviors?
3. Did the principal and his faculty value the behaviors similarly?

It should be pointed out that the study did not seek to define the role of the principal; nor did it seek to evaluate the principals.

### THE METHOD

#### Obtaining the Participants

The participating district had an enrollment of forty thousand children, ranged from industrial suburban to rural in character, and was generally recognized as above average in educating children and youth, as measured by taxing effort, orientation toward change, and other measures.

The six participating schools were randomly selected from a pool of elementary schools, the majority of whose key personnel had been associated at least one year. The faculty in these schools ranged in size from ten to thirty-one staff members. Fourteen of the 105 teachers were men. The principals, three men and three women, had been administrators at their present schools an average of five years, and elsewhere, ten years.

#### Selecting the Behaviors

Thirty-two items of principal behavior were used in the study and derived largely on the basis of frequency of mention from four studies (2, 4, 5, 6) which used the critical incident technique to obtain teacher-observed role behavior of elementary school principals.

The critical incident technique, first mentioned in the literature in 1940 by John C. Flanagan (3) and later refined by him in the United States Air Force psychology program during World War II, is based on direct and extended observation of persons fulfilling some position or job. Included in the thirty-two categories of elementary school principals' behavior are such items as: 1) works personally with emotionally upset students, 2) informs parents of school policies and regulations, and 3) seeks the advice of teachers on school problems.

These thirty-two items represent some of the things an elementary school principal might do as principal, and are believed crucial as to whether the principal succeeds or not by some 4,250 teachers



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and administrators used as the observer group in the four studies previously cited.

These behaviors 1) may have been reported as either effective or ineffective, 2) do not represent a single system or philosophy of school leadership, 3) represent a wide range of possible behaviors affecting the operation of the school, 4) are common, and 5) are observable if enacted.

## Obtaining the Perceptions

In order to obtain perceptions as to the relative worth of these behaviors by the principal and faculty of each school, Q-methodology was employed. This method of forced-choice assessing was elaborated by William Stephenson in 1935 (7). Each of the items of behavior was placed on a separate card. Each person was asked to place the items of behavior into the following pattern according to his idea of the importance of the item:

| Most Important ← | | | | | Least Important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | B | C | D | E | F |
| 1 Item | 5 Items | 10 Items | 10 Items | 5 Items | 1 Item |

After recording the results, the person, whether principal or faculty, was asked to assess the behaviors as he believed the other valued the behaviors.

## Treating the Data

The data so collected from each school were composited, presented, and analyzed as frequency distributions by the faculty of the thirty-two items into the six gradations of value, with the principal's assessments located among the gradations. These graphic representations of the perceptions were visually inspected to note similarities and contrasts, without exotic statistical procedures being employed. For example, when the principal's valuations appeared at one of the extremes of or beyond the range of the distribution of faculty valuations, such a condition was viewed as a dissimilar perception for that item of behavior. Such factors as the tendency for the range to increase as the number of subjects increases, and for the number of alternate choices to decrease at the extremes of the six point scale were taken into account.

## THE RESULTS

How well does the elementary school principal perceive his faculty's values regarding typical things he may do? The data tends to support the contention that the principals in all schools infrequently perceived their faculty's values. The most accurate principal perceived his faculty's values for about one-half of the behaviors, and the least accurate principal, for about one-fourth of the behaviors.

How well does the faculty perceive its principal's values regarding these same behaviors? The faculties in all schools infrequently perceived their principal's values. The accuracy of perception ranged from about one-fourth to one-half.

How similarly are these values held by principal and faculty? The faculty and principal held dissimilar perceptions as to the relative importance they attached to the thirty-two items of behavior on about two-thirds of the items. The school having the least agreement between faculty and principal held similar values on one-fourth of the items.

## SOME INTERPRETATION

What can we say from this? Those persons close to the scene usually describe the elementary school as a closely knit social organization, functioning effectively in terms of the goal set for it—educating the young. When viewed in terms of perceptual accuracy of key personnel within the school, as measured by his study, the question raised is: How can the school do the job it does? If what is true for these six schools is true for many of the others, either accuracy of interpersonal perception is not as essential to productivity or effectiveness as presently thought; or the elementary school, assumed to have a good productivity rating, has a much higher potential for effectiveness if accuracy of interpersonal perception can be increased. What portion of the entire domain of executive professional leadership is encompassed by the findings of this study? It is too early to speculate, but not too early to discover the answer.


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